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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Dodd Loses Ardor for an Early Trial

By Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson

Shortly after Sen. Tom Dodd (D-Conn.) threw himself on the mercy of the Senate Ethics Committee by asking for an official investigation, the Senator brought a $5-million libel suit against this column. The proceedings of the Senate have been open to the public. The libel suit preceedings have been partly in secret — at Dodd's request. So this might be a good time to summarize what has been happening.

Originally Dodd sued for $5 million based on 14 charges. Later his counsel moved to reduce this to $2 million and strike ten counts — all those pertaining to his finances and our detailed account of the manner in which he had raised around $100,000 at two testimonial campaign dinners but had deposited this money to his own personal account.

Subsequently Dodd has refused to answer all questions in deposition regarding his finances. He has also refused to give the Senate Ethics Committee certain papers regarding his finances. The Committee has been forced to issue subpoenas to get them.

Dodd Goes in Reverse

On May 6, shortly after Dodd brought suit, his attorney, John Sonnett, a partner in one of the biggest Wall Street law firms, went before Judge Alexander Holtzoff, after court was closed for the day, and in an *ex parte* proceeding, our lawyers not being present, secured an order directing that former members of Sen. Dodd's staff be subpoenaed forthwith for the immediate taking of depositions. Sonnett led the Judge to believe that these witnesses were about to flee the District of Columbia.

Since that time three months have passed, and only one of these witnesses has been asked by Dodd to testify. No witness has fled. All have sent word they were standing by ready to testify.

Dodd's attorney gave every impression, at first, that he wanted open legal proceedings. His client, he claimed, had nothing to hide.

But when we moved to permit the press to attend pre-trial depositions, Dodd's attorney objected vigorously. He carried the objection to court and secured a ruling for secrecy.

Dodd also demanded that the trial be expedited so it could be heard this summer, preferably in July. Attorney Sonnett scoffed at our statement that, because of the District of Columbia's crowded court docket, trial could not be expected for two years.

Last week, in contrast, Dodd formally asked that all further pre-trial depositions be postponed until September, including the taking of his own deposition. This was refused.

Dodd's Voting Record

When we insisted that Dodd's deposition proceed on schedule, his attorney petitioned the court to permit Dodd to testify in his own Senate office. It is customary for a pre-trial witness to testify in the office of opposing counsel. However, Dodd argued that he wanted to be near the Senate in order to answer important roll calls.

The court acceded to Dodd's request. During the first day of his deposition, counsel was able to cross-examine him for only about 70 minutes, since he was absent for 45 minutes on a quorum call.

This was interesting, first because a quorum call should not take more then five or ten minutes; second because the Senator suddenly displayed an unusual interest in voting.

Senators who serve on key committees with Dodd have long noted his remarkable absentee record.

He is a member of the important Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Sen. Everett Dirksen at one time criticized his attendance record as follows: "The rambling Senator from Connecticut has one of the worst absentee records in Congress. He rivals Adam Clayton Powell."

We are glad that our depositions have caused the Senator from Connecticut to pay more attention to quorum calls and Senate votes.

U.S. Helping Hand

One untold story of the Vietnam war is the way American troops have ben helping the Vietnamese people.

The 25th Infantry Division, for instance, started a "tropic lightening helping hand" program even before its members left Hawaii for Vietnam. The Hawaiian people pitched in to help, donating 350 tons of clothing, plus $5500 cash.

Since the 25th Infantry arrived in Vietnam in May, its members have distributed 2700 toothbrushes, 10,000 bars of soap, 1800 pencils, 8 tons of clothing to Vietnamese near the fighting front.

Division members have even donated sewing machines and established a sewing center at Tananhoi village, and distributed school supplies and books to school children.

One of the problems with American troops fighting in rural Vietnam is that they have been considered white invaders. Letters received from villagers indicate that the Helping Hand operation has counteracted this. It has been more successful than the Vietcong in winning over the countryside.

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